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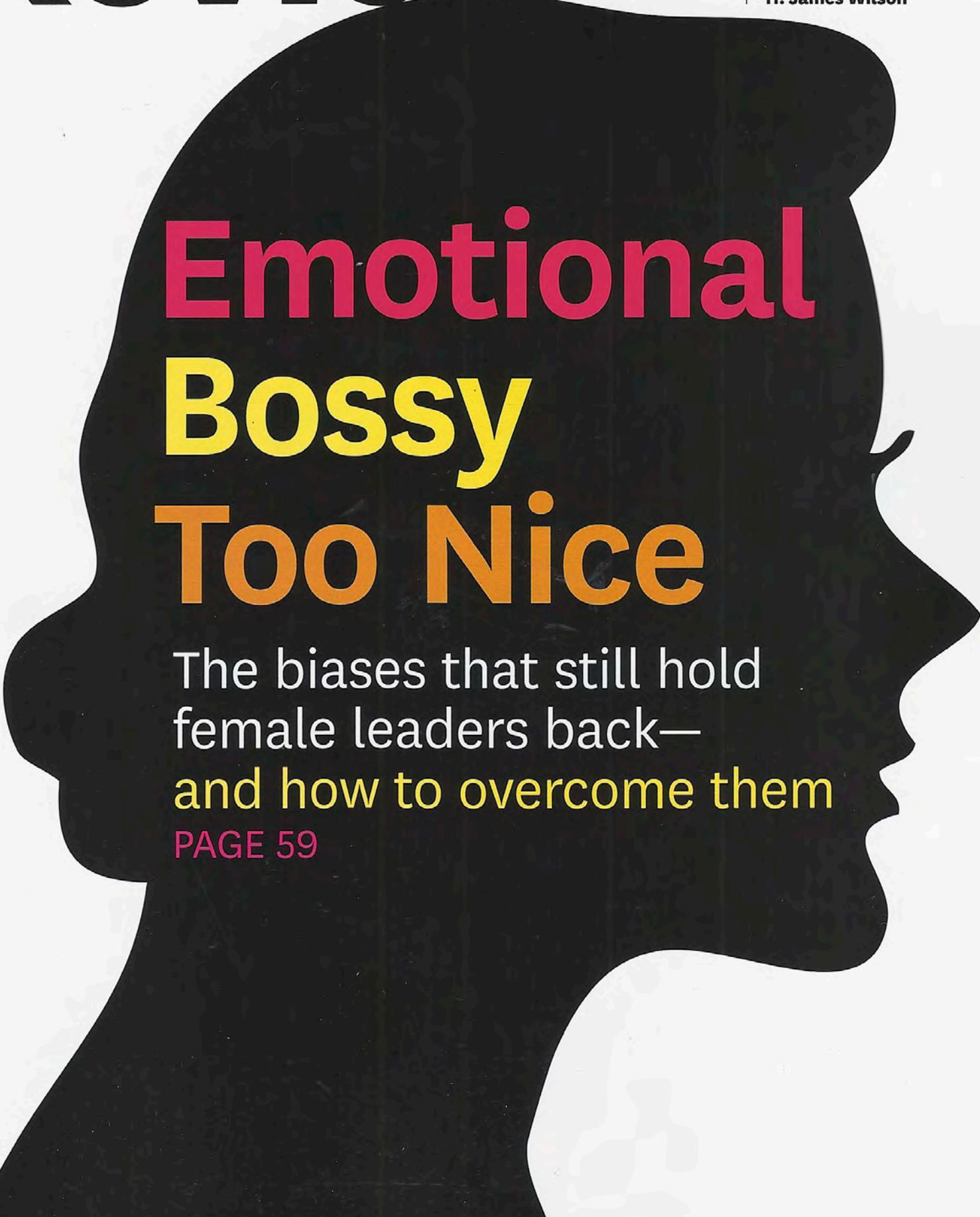
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**Women in the Workplace:
A Research Roundup**

Women in Leadership

Businesses with diverse leadership teams generally do better in the marketplace—but even so, gender parity is still rare at the highest levels. Why does that paradox persist, and what can be done about it?

ARTWORK Janet Echelman
*1.26 Sculpture Project at the
Biennial of the Americas*
July 6–August 6, 2010
Spectra Fiber, high-tenacity
polyester fiber, and lighting
230' x 63' x 30'
Denver Art Museum
Denver, Colorado

Spotlight

ARTWORK Janet Echelman, *1.26 Sculpture Project at the Amsterdam Light Festival*
December 7, 2012–January 20, 2013, Spectra Fiber, high-tenacity polyester fiber, and lighting, 230' x 63' x 30', Amstel River, Amsterdam, Netherlands

Women Rising: The Unseen Barriers

Persistent gender bias too often disrupts the learning process at the heart of becoming a leader. Here's how to correct the problem.
by Herminia Ibarra, Robin Ely, and Deborah Kolb

PHOTOGRAPHY: COURTESY OF JANUSVANDEN EINDEN

Many CEOs who make gender diversity a priority—by setting aspirational goals for the proportion of women in leadership roles, insisting on diverse slates of candidates for senior positions, and developing mentoring and training programs—are frustrated. They and their companies spend time, money, and good intentions on efforts to build a more robust pipeline of upwardly mobile women, and then not much happens.

The problem with these leaders' approaches is that they don't address the often fragile process of coming to see oneself, and to be seen by others, as a leader. Becoming a leader involves much more than being put in a leadership role, acquiring new skills, and adapting one's style to the requirements of that role. It involves a fundamental identity shift. Organizations inadvertently undermine this process when they advise women to proactively seek leadership roles without also addressing policies and practices that communicate a mismatch between how women are seen and the qualities and experiences people tend to associate with leaders.

A significant body of research (see "Further Reading") shows that for women, the subtle gender bias that persists in organizations and in society disrupts the learning cycle at the heart of becoming a leader. This research also points to some steps that companies can take in order to rectify the situation. It's not enough to identify and instill the "right" skills and competencies as if in a social vacuum. The context must support a woman's motivation to lead and also increase the likelihood that others will recognize and encourage her efforts—even when she doesn't look or behave like the current generation of senior executives.

The solutions to the pipeline problem are very different from what companies currently employ. Traditional high-potential, mentoring, and leadership education programs are necessary but not sufficient. Our research, teaching, and consulting reveal three additional actions companies can take to improve the chances that women will gain a sense of themselves as leaders, be recognized as such, and ultimately succeed. (This article expands on our paper "Taking Gender into Account: Theory and Design for Women's Leadership Development Programs," *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, September 2011.)

Becoming a Leader

People become leaders by *internalizing a leadership identity and developing a sense of purpose*. Internalizing a sense of oneself as a leader is an iterative process. A person asserts leadership by taking purposeful action—such as convening a meeting to revive a dormant project. Others affirm or resist the action, thus encouraging or discouraging subsequent assertions. These interactions inform the person's sense of self as a leader and communicate how others view his or her fitness for the role.

As a person's leadership capabilities grow and opportunities to demonstrate them expand, high-profile, challenging assignments and other organizational endorsements become more likely. Such affirmation gives the person the fortitude to step outside a comfort zone and experiment with unfamiliar behaviors and new ways of exercising leadership. An absence of affirmation, however, diminishes self-confidence and discourages him or her from seeking developmental opportunities or experimenting. Leadership identity, which begins as a tentative, peripheral aspect of the self, eventually withers away, along with opportunities to grow through new assignments and real achievements. Over time, an aspiring leader acquires a reputation as having—or not having—high potential.

The story of an investment banker we'll call Amanda is illustrative. Amanda's career stalled when she was in her thirties. Her problem, she was told, was that she lacked "presence" with clients (who were mostly older men) and was not sufficiently outspoken in meetings. Her career prospects looked bleak. But both her reputation and her confidence grew when she was assigned to work with two clients whose CFOs happened to be women. These women appreciated Amanda's smarts and the skillful way she handled their needs and concerns. Each in her own way started taking the initiative to raise



About the Spotlight Artist

Each month we illustrate our Spotlight package with a series of works from an accomplished artist. The lively and cerebral creations of these photographers, painters, and installation artists are meant to infuse our pages with additional energy and intelligence to amplify what are often complex and abstract concepts.

This month we showcase the work of **Janet Echelman**, an American artist who specializes in large-scale public installations. Using fishing nets as her medium, she creates experiential sculpture that shifts with the winds and weather. Her 2011 TED talk "Taking Imagination Seriously" has attracted nearly 1 million views. See the artist's work at echelman.com.

Spotlight

ARTWORK Janet Echelman, *Target Swooping Down... Bullseye!*
2001, hand-knotted nylon lace net, 140' x 140' x 90'
Madrid, Spain

Great Leaders Who Make the Mix Work



Boris Groysberg is a professor of business administration in the organizational behavior unit at Harvard Business School and the coauthor, with Michael Slind, of *Talk, Inc.* (Harvard Business Review Press, 2012).

Katherine Connolly works in the organizational behavior unit at HBS.

Twenty-four CEOs on creating diverse and inclusive organizations
by Boris Groysberg and Katherine Connolly

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BUSINESS LEADERS SEND a powerful message when they demonstrate a commitment to diversity and inclusion that goes beyond rhetoric. But how does diversity make its way to the top of a CEO's agenda? To find out, we interviewed 24 CEOs from around the globe who ran companies and corporate divisions that had earned reputations for embracing people from all kinds of backgrounds. These executives represented a wide range of industries and regions, as well as different stages on the journey to creating an inclusive culture. Our goal was to understand not only why they had made diversity a strategic priority but also how they executed on their goals and what that meant to the organization and its practices.

PHOTOGRAPHY: COURTESY OF ENRIQUE DIAZ

The CEOs we spoke with did not see diversity as a once-and-done initiative, nor did they hand off the responsibility for it to others. Rather, each of the 24, in his or her own way, approached inclusivity as a personal mission. When we asked these executives why advancing diversity in their organizations was so important to them, the aggregate answer was twofold: They believed it was a business imperative because their companies needed it to stay competitive, and they believed it was a moral imperative because of their personal experiences and values. As Mikael Ohlsson of the Swedish home-products company IKEA put it, “My leadership on diversity is vision-driven from a business point of view and value-driven at the foundation.”

These CEOs spoke forcefully about diversity as an advantage. Paul Block of the U.S. sweetener manufacturer Merisant pointed out, “People with different lifestyles and different backgrounds challenge each other more. Diversity creates dissent, and you need that. Without it, you’re not going to get any deep inquiry or breakthroughs.” Or, as Jonathan Broomberg of the South African insurer Discovery Health put it, diversity is “a source of creativity and innovation.”

A diverse workforce also prevents an organization from becoming too insular and out of touch with its increasingly heterogeneous customer base. Many of the CEOs asserted that it is crucial for a company’s employees to reflect the people they serve. Brian Moynihan of Bank of America saw an important link to customer satisfaction: “When internal diversity and inclusion scores are strong, and employees feel valued, they will serve our customers better, and we’ll be better off as an organization.”



AJAY BANGA CEO OF MASTERCARD

“My passion for diversity comes from the fact that I myself am diverse. There have been a hundred times when I have felt different from other people in the room or in the business. I have a turban and a full beard, and I run a global company—that’s not common.”



The Role of Personal Experience

A CEO’s commitment often arises from his or her own understanding of what it means to be an outsider. Take Andrea Jung of the personal-care-products firm Avon. (Note that Jung, like a number of other CEOs we talked with, has stepped down since our interview with her.) Describing her career, she said: “I was often the only woman or Asian sitting around a table of senior executives. I experienced plenty of meetings outside my organization with large groups of executives where people assumed that I couldn’t be the boss, even though I was.” MasterCard’s CEO, Ajay Banga—a Sikh from India who was hassled in the United States after 9/11—shared something similar: “My passion for diversity comes from the fact that I myself am diverse. There have been a hundred times when I have felt different from other people in the room or in the business. I have a turban and a full beard, and I run a global company—that’s not common.”

Carlos Ghosn of Nissan Motor Company told us how bias had affected his own family. “My mother was one of eight children,” he said. “She used to be a very brilliant student, and when the time came to go to college, she wanted to become a doctor. Unfortunately, her mother had to explain to her that there was not enough money in the family, and that the money for college was going to the boys and the girls would instead have to marry. When I was a kid and my mother was telling me this story—without any bitterness, by the way, just matter-of-fact—I was outraged because it was my mother. After hearing that story, I said I would never do anything to hurt someone based on segregation.”

To Ghosn, gender bias is a personal affront. “When I see that women do not have the same opportunities as men, it touches me in a personal way,” he said. “I think it’s some kind of refusal related to my sisters or to my daughters.”

Even white male CEOs had stories to share. Kentucky native Jim Rogers of the electric-utility holding company Duke Energy felt like an outsider at the start of his career. “When I went to Washington to be a lawyer, I felt like I had to work harder, be better, and prove myself because I had a southern accent and came from a rural state,” he said. The self-awareness, insight, and empathy that Rogers and other chief executives acquired from personal experience have clearly shaped their attitudes toward diversity and inclusion and informed their priorities as leaders.

Spotlight

How Women Decide

In B2B selling, it matters if your buyer is female.

by Cathy Benko and Bill Pelster

I**N 2005** seven partners and senior staffers at Deloitte (including the male coauthor of this article) prepared for a meeting with a prospective client, a large hospital undergoing an exciting transformation. Aware that a multimillion-dollar piece of business would be won or lost on the basis of their pitch, the key presenters pored over their slide deck, crossing the t's and dotting the i's. They reviewed everything they knew about the hospital and rehearsed their case for why Deloitte was the ideal choice. Their proposal would emphasize Deloitte's view of projects as collaborations; the team would walk in the client's shoes.

During the meeting, the partners covered all their talking points. They came away certain that they had addressed every concern outlined in the client's request for proposal and hopeful that Deloitte would win the project. But they also felt that something

PHOTOGRAPHY: COURTESY OF GEORGE COTT



ARTWORK Janet Echelman, *Line Drawing*, 2006–2007, high-tenacity multifilament polypropylene, 36-degree ellipsoidal spotlights, colored dichroic glass filters, 408' x 56' x 33', Tampa, Florida

had seemed off during the presentation. The consultants and client representatives never quite got on the same wavelength. What could explain the lack of rapport in the room? One aspect of this high-stakes meeting was different from the partners' usual experience: Half the client attendees were women. The consultants had known this would be the case ahead of time, but it hadn't occurred to them to alter their pitch in any way because of that. In the end, the hospital did not choose Deloitte for the job.

Stories like this were becoming increasingly frequent, so we decided to look closely at what was going on. In response to an internal survey, 70% of our senior managers told us they perceived that selling to women was different from selling to men. This was interesting. We knew that women, as a group, experienced work in a professional services firm differently, and we had a women's initiative (known as WIN) whose mission was to drive marketplace growth and create a culture where highly talented women would choose to work. Could the same initiative shed light on the growing population of female buyers and influencers, and perhaps reveal selling approaches that would work better for them?

Today women occupy about half of all managerial and professional positions in the United States, including 37% of management jobs and 60% of accounting and auditing roles, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. They also make up 41% of employees with authority to make purchasing decisions. Recognizing that the majority of our partners and managers, including those who were female, had honed their skills selling to men, and that a rapidly growing percentage of our potential clients were women, we realized it was time to reexamine our assumptions about how to explore opportunities and close deals.

A Fair Suspicion

The findings from our internal survey reinforced other evidence of gender differences in decision making. Insights from brain research are especially fascinating. According to a study conducted at the University of California, Irvine, men's brains have approximately 6.5 times more gray matter than women's, and women's brains have nearly 10 times more white matter than men's. Because gray matter characterizes information processing centers and white matter facilitates the connections among those centers, scientists theorize that those differences might explain why men tend to excel in tasks that depend

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TO MAKE
PURCHASING
DECISIONS**

on sheer processing while women show relative strength in tasks that call for assimilating and integrating disparate pieces of information. What's more, the cord connecting the left and right lobes is 10% thicker, on average, in female brains. And women have wider peripheral vision than men do. In case you're wondering, neither brain type performs better than the other on broad measures of cognitive ability such as intelligence tests. The differences, however, have implications for how decisions are made.

We know from decades of research that women tend to behave differently than men as shoppers in business-to-consumer (B2C) settings. Take as one small example "Gender differences in information search strategies for a Christmas gift," a study published in 1984 in the *Journal of Consumer Marketing*. It found that "females appeared to comprehensively acquire in-store information, whereas males appeared to heuristically limit their search to a smaller subset of in-store information." The typical man, in other words, is mission- and task-oriented. Having determined that he needs black slacks, he will go directly to a store, pick out a pair within a half hour, and perhaps even buy two of the same item to avoid having to make the same purchase again too soon.

The typical woman, on the other hand, is a discovery-oriented shopper. Starting out with the same idea of purchasing a pair of black slacks, she will more typically approach the search with an open mind. What she really needs, she realizes, is a professional look for an upcoming conference. Not impressed by the slacks selection, or pleasantly surprised by something else, she readily adjusts her goal. The process might take significantly longer than 30 minutes, but it is more likely to result in a satisfying outcome.

Does this kind of difference carry over to how senior women make business-to-business (B2B) decisions? We were surprised, given such rich reserves of gender-related B2C studies, to find no significant research to provide an answer. So beginning in 2006 we set about conducting our own, interviewing experienced buyers of professional services, both men and women. They came from 18 large organizations, including Amvescap, Blue Shield of California, Hewlett-Packard, and Jones Lang LaSalle.

The insights provided by that research, combined with the growing literature on gender effects in cognition and consumption, support our observations in meetings with hundreds of prospective and existing clients. Along the way, we have assembled a